

# Taba language

**Taba** (also known as **East Makian** or **Makian Dalam**) is a Malayo-Polynesian language of the South Halmahera–West New Guinea group. It is spoken mostly on the islands of Makian, Kayoa and southern Halmahera in North Maluku province of Indonesia by about 20,000 people.<sup>[3]</sup>

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Taba	
<b>Native to</b>	Indonesia
<b>Region</b>	North Maluku province
<b>Native speakers</b>	(20,000+ cited 1983) <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Language family</b>	<div>Austronesian<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Malayo-Polynesian<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Central–Eastern Malayo-Polynesian<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Eastern Malayo-Polynesian<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>South Halmahera–West New Guinea<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Halmahera Sea<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>South Halmahera<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Taba–Gane<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Taba</b></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></div>
Language codes	
<b>ISO 639-3</b>	mky
<b>Glottolog</b>	east2440 ( <a href="http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/east2440">http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/east2440</a> ) <sup>[2]</sup>

## Dialects

There are minor differences in dialect between all of the villages on Makian island in which Taba is spoken. Most differences affect only a few words. One of the most widespread reflexes is the use of /o/ in Waikyon and Waigitang, where in other villages /a/ is retained from Proto-South Halmaheran.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Geographic distribution

As of 2005, Ethnologue lists Taba as having a speaking population of approximately 20,000, however, it has been argued by linguists that this number could in reality be anywhere between 20,000 and 50,000.<sup>[5]</sup> The language is predominantly spoken on Eastern Makian island, although it is also found on Southern Mori island, Kayoa islands, Bacan and Obi island and along the west coast of south Halmahera. There has also been continued migration of speakers to other areas of North Maluku due to frequent volcanic eruptions on Makian island.<sup>[6]</sup> The island itself is home to two languages: Taba, which is spoken on the eastern side of the island, and a Papuan language spoken on the western side, known alternatively as West Makian or Makian Luar (outer Makian); in Taba, this language is known as *Taba Lik* ("Outer Taba"), while its native speakers know it as *Moi*.

## Speech levels

Taba is divided into three different levels of speech: *alus*, *biasa* and *kasar*.

Alus, or 'refined' Taba is used in situations in which the speaker is addressing someone older or of greater status than the speaker themselves.

Biasa, or 'ordinary' Taba, is used in most general situations.

The Kasar, or 'coarse' form of Taba is used only rarely and generally in anger.

## Phonology

Taba has fifteen indigenous consonant phonemes, and four loan phonemes: /ʔ dʒ tʃ f/. These are shown below:

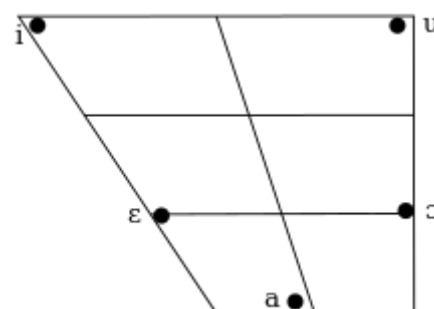
Consonants<sup>[7]</sup>

	<u>Bilabial</u>	<u>Apico-alveolar</u>	<u>Lamino-palatal</u>	<u>Dorso-velar</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
<u>Stop</u>	b p	d t		g k	(ʔ)
<u>Nasal</u>	m	n		ŋ	
<u>Affricate</u>			(dʒ tʃ)		
<u>Fricative</u>	(f)	s			
<u>Trill</u>			r		
<u>Lateral</u>			l		
<u>Approximant</u>	w		j		h

Taba has five vowels, illustrated on the table below. The front and central vowels are unrounded; the back vowels are rounded.

Vowels<sup>[8]</sup>

	<u>Front</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>Back</u>
<u>Close</u>	i i:		u u:
<u>Mid</u>	e e:		o o:
<u>Open</u>		a a:	



The vowel phonemes of Taba on a vowel chart

## Grammar

## Word order

Taba is, predominantly, a head-marking language which adheres to a basic AVO word order. However, there is a reasonable degree of flexibility.<sup>[9]</sup>

- (1) *yak k=ha-lekat pakakas ne*  
1SG 1SG=CAUS-broken tool PROX  
"I broke this tool."

Taba has both prepositions and postpositions.

## Pronouns

Independent Pronouns<sup>[10]</sup>

Person	Number	
	Singular	Plural
1INC		tit
1EXCL	yak	am
2	au	meu
3	i	si

In Taba, pronouns constitute an independent, closed set. Syntactically, Taba pronouns can be used in any context where a full noun phrase is applicable. However, independent pronouns are only used in reference to animate entities, unless pronominal reference to inanimate Patients is required in reflexive clauses.<sup>[11]</sup>

As mentioned, independent pronouns are generally used for animate reference. However, there are two exceptions to this generalisation. In some circumstances an inanimate is considered a 'higher inanimate' which accords syntactic status similar to animates.<sup>[11]</sup> This is represented as in English where inanimates such as cars or ships, for example, can be ascribed a gender. This is illustrated below in a response to the question 'Why did the *Taba Jaya* (name of a boat) stop coming to Makian?':<sup>[11]</sup>

- (1) *Ttumo i te ndara*  
*t=tum-o i te ndara*  
1pl.incl=follow-APPL 3sg NEG too.much  
'We didn't catch it enough.'

The *Taba Jaya*, a boat significant enough to be given a name, is accorded pronoun status similar to animates. The other exception occurs in reflexive clauses where a pronominal copy of a reflexive Patient is required, as shown below:<sup>[11]</sup>

- (2) *Bonci ncayak i tadia*  
*bonci n-say-ak i ta-dia*  
peanut 3sg-spread-APPL 3sg SIM-REM  
'Peanut (leaves) spread out on itself like that.'

Non-human animates and inanimates are always grammatically singular, regardless of how many referents are involved. In Taba, pronouns and noun phrases are marked by Person and Number.

## Person

Taba distinguishes three Persons in the pronominal and cross-referencing systems.<sup>[11]</sup> Person is marked on both pronouns and on cross-referencing proclitics attached to verb phrases.<sup>[12]</sup> The actor cross-referencing proclitics are outlined in the following table.<sup>[13]</sup> In the first Person plural, a clusivity distinction is made, 'inclusive' (including the addressee) and 'exclusive' (excluding the addressee), as is common to most Austronesian languages.<sup>[13]</sup>

Cross-referencing proclitics			
<b>1sg</b>	<b>k=</b>	<b>1 pl.incl</b> <b>1 pl.excl</b>	<b>t=</b> <b>a=</b>
<b>2sg</b>	<b>m=</b>	<b>2 pl</b>	<b>h=</b>
<b>3sg</b>	<b>n=</b>	<b>3 pl</b>	<b>l=</b>

The following are examples of simple Actor intransitive clauses showing each of the proclitic prefixes. This is an example of first Person singular (inclusive);<sup>[12]</sup>

(3) *yak kwom*

yak k=wom

1sg 1sg=come

'I've come'

second Person singular;<sup>[12]</sup>

(4) *Au mwom*

au m=wom

2sg 2sg=come

'You've come. (you singular)'

third Person singular;<sup>[12]</sup>

(5) *I nwom*

i n=wom

3sg 3sg=come

'S/he's come.'

first Person plural (inclusive);<sup>[12]</sup>

(6) *Tit twom*

tit t=wom

1pl.incl 1pl.incl=come

'We've come. (You and I)'

first Person plural (exclusive);<sup>[12]</sup>

(7) *Am*

am

*awom*

a=wom

1pl.excl

1pl.excl=come

'We've come. (myself and one or more other people but not you)'

second Person plural; and<sup>[12]</sup>

(8) *Meu hwom*

meu h=wom

2pl 2pl=come

'You've come. (you plural)'

third Person plural;<sup>[12]</sup>

(9) *Si lwom*

si l=wom

3pl 3pl=come

'They've come.'

The alternation between proclitic markers indicates Number, where in (3) *k=* denotes the arrival of a singular Actor, while in (7) *a=* indicates the arrival of first Person plural Actors, exclusionary of the addressee, and is replicated in the change of prefix in the additional examples.

## Number

Number is marked on noun phrases and pronouns. Taba distinguishes grammatically between singular and plural categories, as shown in (3) to (9) above. Plural marking is obligatory for humans and is used for all noun phrases which refer to multiple individuals. Plurality is also used to indicate respect in the second and third Person when addressing or speaking of an individual who is older than the speaker.<sup>[4]</sup> The rules for marking Number on noun phrases are summarised in the table below:<sup>[4]</sup>

Marking Number		
	singular	plural
human	Used for one person when person is same age or younger than speaker.	Used for one person when person is older than speaker. Used for more than one person in all contexts.
non-human animate	Used no matter how many referents	Not used
inanimate	Used no matter how many referents	Not used

The enclitic *=si* marks Number in noun phrases. *=si* below (10), indicates that there is more than one child playing on the beach and, in (11), the enclitic indicates that the noun phrase *mama lo baba*, translated as 'mother and father,' is plural.<sup>[4]</sup>

(10) *Wangsi lalawa lawe solo li*

wang=si l=ha=lawa la-we solo li

child=PL 3pl=CAUS-play sea-ESS beach LOC

'The children are playing on the beach.'

(11) Nim mama li babasi laoblak  
 nim mama lo baba=si l-ha=obal-k  
 2SG.POSS mother and father=PL 3PL=CAUS-call-APPL  
 'Your mother and father are calling you.'

Plural Number is used as a marker of respect not only for second Person addressees, but for third Person referents as seen in (12).<sup>[4]</sup> In Taba, it has been observed that many adults use deictic shifts towards the perspective of addressee children regarding the use of plural markers. Example (13) is typical of an utterance of an older person than those they are referring to, indicative of respect that should be accorded to the referent by the addressee.<sup>[4]</sup>

(12) Ksung Om Nur nidi um li  
 k=sung Om Nur nidi um li  
 1sg=enter Uncle Nur 3pl.POSS house LOC  
 'I went into Om Nur's house.'

(13) Nim babasi e lo li e?  
 nim baba=si e lo li e  
 2sg.POSS father=PL FOC where LOC FOC  
 'Where is your father?'

## Pronominal affixes

All Taba verbs having Actor arguments carry affixes which cross-reference the Number and Person of the Actor, examples of proclitics are shown above. In Taba, there are valence-changing affixes which deal with patterns of cross-referencing with three distinct patterns. The dominant pattern is used with all verbs having an Actor argument. The other two patterns are confined to a small number of verbs: one for the possessive verb, the other for a few verbs of excretion. This is discussed further in Possession below.

## Possession

Taba does not, as such, have possessive pronouns. Rather, the possessor noun and the possessed entity are linked by a possessive ligature. The Taba ligatures are shown below:

Possessive Particles<sup>[12]</sup>

<u>Person</u>	<u>Number</u>	
	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
<b>1INC</b>		nit
<b>1EXCL</b>	nik	am
<b>2</b>	nim	meu
<b>3</b>	ni	nidi/di

## Adnominal possession

Adnominal possession involves the introduction of an inflected possessive particle between the possessor and the possessed entity; this inflected possessive, formally categorised as a 'ligature', is cross-referenced with the number and person of the possessor. This ligature indicates a possessive relationship between a

modifier noun and its head-noun. In Taba, adnominal possession is distinguished by reverse genitive ordering, in which the possessor noun precedes the noun referring to the possessed entity.<sup>[14]</sup>

In many contexts the possessor will not be overtly referenced.

Example of reverse genitive ordering in Taba:

- (12) *ni mtu*  
3SG.POSS child  
"His/her child."

### Obligatory possessive marking

In Taba, alienable and inalienable possession is not obligatorily marked by the use of different forms, though this is common in many related languages. However, there are a number of seemingly inalienable entities which cannot be referred to without referencing a possessor.<sup>[15]</sup>

For example:

- (13) *meja ni wwe*  
table 3SG.POSS leg  
"The leg (of the table)."

### Verbal possession

Verbal possession in Taba is generally indicated through the attaching of the causative prefix *ha-* to the adnominal possessive forms. The possessor then becomes actor of the clause, and the possessed entity becomes the undergoer.<sup>[16]</sup> This method of forming a possessive verb is very unusual, typologically, and is found in almost no other languages.<sup>[17]</sup>

- (14) *kabin da yak k=ha-nik*  
goat DIST 1SG 1SG=CAUS-1SG.POSS  
"That goat, I own it."

### Negation

Like other Central-Eastern Malayo-Polynesian languages spoken in the Maluku Islands, Taba uses different particles to negate declarative and imperative clauses;<sup>[18]</sup> declaratives are negated using *te*, while imperatives are negated using *oik*.<sup>[19]</sup> In both cases the negative particles are clause-final, a placement which is posited to be the result of contact with non-Austronesian Papuan languages.<sup>[20]</sup>

### Negation of declaratives using *te*

Declarative clauses are negated using the particle *te*, which follows all other elements of the clause except for modal and aspectual particles (these are discussed below).<sup>[21]</sup> Examples (15a) and (15b) show negation of an Actor intransitive clause, while (16a) and (16b) give negation of a non-Actor bivalent clause (i.e. a clause with two Undergoer arguments); *te* has the same clause-final placement regardless of the clause structure.

(15a) *Nhan*                      *akla*  
       n=han                      ak-la  
       3sg=go                    ALL-sea  
       'She's going seawards.' (Bowden 2001, p. 335)

(15b) *Nhan*                      *akla*                      *te*  
       n=han                      ak-la                      te  
       3sg=go                    ALL-sea                    NEG  
       'She's not going seawards.' (Bowden 2001, p. 335)

(16a) *Nik*                      *calana*                      *kudak*                      *asfal*  
       nik                      ak-lacalana              kuda-k                      asfal  
       1sg.POSS              trousers                  be.black-APPL              bitumen  
       'My trousers are blackened with bitumen.' (Bowden 2001, p. 336)

(16b) *Nik*                      *calana*                      *kudak*                      *asfal*                      *te*  
       nik                      ak-lacalana              kuda-k                      asfal                      te  
       1sg.POSS              trousers                  be.black-APPL              bitumen                    NEG  
       'My trousers are not blackened with bitumen.' (Bowden 2001, p. 336)

Negation of complex sentences can be ambiguous — see example (17), where *te* can operate on either just the complement clause *khan* 'I'm going' or to the whole clause complex *kalusa khan* 'I said I'm going':<sup>[22]</sup>

(17) *Kalusa*                                      *khan*                      *te*  
       k=ha-lusa                                      k=han                      te  
       1sg=CAUSE-say                                      1sg=go                      NEG  
       'I said I'm not going.' / 'I didn't say I'm going.' (Bowden 2001, p. 335)

### Negative existential clauses<sup>[22]</sup>

*te* can serve as the predicator of a negative existential clause, with no verb required. It can occur immediately following the noun phrase that refers to whatever is being asserted as non-existent, as in (18):

(18) *Nik*                      *dalawat*                      *te*  
       nik                      dalawat                      te  
       1sg.POSS                      girlfriend                      NEG  
       'I don't have a girlfriend.' (Bowden 2001, p. 336)

However, a discourse marker is generally interposed between the noun phrase and *te*. This marker expresses something about how the non-existence of the noun phrase's referent relates to the discourse context, or alternatively indicates the speaker's attitude towards the proposition.<sup>[22]</sup> In (19), the discourse marker *mai* (glossed as 'but') is used to indicate that the non-existence of tea, sugar and coffee in the household described by the speaker is counter to one's expectations that a normal household would have these items:

(19) *Te*    *mai*    *te;*              *gula*    *mai*    *te;*              *kofi*              *mai*    *te*  
       tea    but    NEG    sugar    but    NEG    coffee    but    NEG  
       'There's no tea; there's no sugar; there's no coffee.' (Bowden 2001, p. 336)

### Complex negative modal / aspectual particles<sup>[23]</sup>



Taba has three complex negative particles which, in addition to negation, express mood or aspect; these are formed by the modal and aspectual particles attaching onto *te* as clitics. The three particles are *tedo* (realis negative), *tehu* (continuative negative), and *tesu* (potential negative).

### ***tedo* (realis negative)<sup>[24]</sup>**

*tedo* is a compound of *te* and the realis mood marker *do*, and expresses a more emphatic negation than plain *te*. In (20), it is used to emphasize the absolute nature of the prohibition against making alcohol in the Muslim community of the speaker:

(20)	<i>Mai</i>	<i>ane</i>	<i>lpeik</i>	<i>saguer</i>	<i>tedo</i> .
	mai	a-ne	l=pe-ik	saguer	te-do
	but	DEM-PROX	3pl=make-APPL	palm.wine	NEG-REAL
	'But here they don't make palm wine with it anymore.' (Bowden 2001, p. 338)				

### ***tehu* (continuative negative)<sup>[25]</sup>**

*tehu* is a compound of *te* and the continuous aspect marker *hu*, and can be roughly translated as 'not up to the relevant point in time': this may be either the time of utterance (i.e. 'not yet', 'still not'), or some other time relevant to the context of the utterance, as in (21). Unlike the potential negative *tesu*, *tehu* does not express any expectations about the likelihood of the negated event or state occurring in the future.

(21)	<i>Manganco</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>dukon</i>	<i>tehu</i>
	manganco	ne	dukon	te-hu
	long.time	PROX	eruption	NEG-CONT
	'For a long time there hadn't been an eruption.' (Bowden 2001, p. 338)			

*tehu* also often appears at the end of the first clause in a sequence of clauses, indicating whatever is referred to by the first clause has not still occurred by the time of the event(s) or state(s) referred to by the following clauses.

(22)	<i>Karna</i>	<i>taplod</i>	<i>tehu,</i>	<i>manusia</i>	<i>loas</i>	<i>do</i> .
	karna	ta-plod	te-hu	manusia	l=oas	do
	because	DETR-erupt	NEG-CONT	people	3pl=flee	REAL
	'Because the mountain had still not erupted when everyone fled.' (Bowden 2001, p. 338)					

### ***tesu* (potential negative)<sup>[26]</sup>**

*tesu* is formed by suffixing *-su*, expressing the potential mood, to *te*. Although *tesu* is similar to *tehu* in that it encodes the meaning 'not up to the relevant point in time', it also expresses an expectation that the event referred to *will* occur in the future: this expectation is made explicit in the free translation of (23).

(23)	<i>Sedi</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>dumik</i>	<i>tesu</i>
	sedi	ne	dumik	te-su
	garden.shelter	PROX	be.complete	NEG-POT
	'This garden shelter is not yet finished.' [but I expect it to be finished later] (Bowden 2001, p. 339)			

*tesu* shares with *tehu* the ability to be used at the end of the first clause in a sequence of clauses, and also carries a similar meaning of incompleteness; in addition, it encodes the expectation that the event referred to by the first clause should have happened by the event(s) of the following clauses. This expectation does not need to have actually been fulfilled; the breakfast that was expected to be cooked in the first clause of (24) was, in reality, never cooked due to the ensuing eruption.

(24) <i>Hadala</i>	<i>mosa</i>	<i>tesu,</i>	<i>taplod</i>	<i>haso</i>	<i>nak.</i>
hadala	mosa	te-su	ta-plod	ha=so	nak
breakfast	be.cooked	NEG-POT	DETR-erupt	CLASS=one	also
'Breakfast was still not cooked (although I had every expectation that it would be) when it erupted again.' (Bowden 2001, p. 339)					

Unlike the modal and aspectual markers which are used to form the other complex negative particles, *su* is not attested as a free morpheme elsewhere; however, it is likely related to the optional final -s of the modal verb *-ahate(s)* 'to be unable', which appears to be derived historically from *te* having fused onto the verb *-ahan* 'to be able'.<sup>[27]</sup> When used with a final -s, as in (25b) compared with (25a), this modal verb encodes the same meanings expressed by *tesu*:

(25a) <i>Irianti</i>	<i>nasodas</i>	<i>nahate</i>
Irianti	n=ha-sodas	n=ahate
Irianti	3sg=CAUS-suck[smoke]	3sg=be.unable
'Irianti is not allowed to smoke.' (Bowden 2001, p. 317)		
(25b) <i>Iswan</i>	<i>nasodas</i>	<i>nahates</i>
Iswan	n=ha-sodas	n=ahate-s
Iswan	3sg=CAUS-suck[smoke]	3sg=be.unable-POT
'Iswan is not allowed to smoke (now. But he will be allowed to in the future).' (Bowden 2001, p. 318)		

## Negation of imperatives using *oik*

Imperative clauses are negated using the admonitive particle *oik*. This particle appears to be derived from a verb *oik* 'to leave something behind'; however, this verb requires Actor cross-referencing, whereas the particle is never cross-referenced.<sup>[28]</sup> Bowden (2001) posits that the imperative use of *oik* has developed from the use of the independent verb in serial verb constructions, with the morphological elements being lost in the process of grammaticalization.<sup>[29]</sup> The particle is shown in (26), while the verbal use (with cross-referencing) is shown in (27):

(26) <i>Hmomas</i>	<i>meu</i>	<i>komo mai</i>	<i>hmomsak</i>	<i>meu</i>	<i>calana</i>	<i>oik</i>
h=momas	meu	komo mai	h=momas=ak	meu	calana	oik
2pl=wipe	2pl.POSS	hand	but	2pl=wipe=APPL	2pl.POSS	trousers
ADMON						
'Wipe your hands, but don't wipe them with your trousers.' (Bowden 2001, p. 337)						
(27) <i>Nim</i>	<i>suka</i>	<i>moik</i>	<i>nim</i>	<i>sagala</i>	<i>ane?</i>	
nim	suka	m=oik	nim	sagala	a-ne	
2sg.POSS	desire	2sg=leave.behind	2sg.POSS	stuff	LOC-PROX	
'Do you want to leave your stuff behind here?' (Bowden 2001, p. 337)						

## Using negative particles as question tags

Yes-no (polar) questions can be posed with either positive or negative polarity; positive polarity questions operate in much the same way as in English, while negative polarity questions, which are formed using forms of the negative marker *te* as question tags, work in a different manner.<sup>[30]</sup> An example of a positive polarity question is given below in (28a), while (28b) shows a negative polarity question:

- (28a) *Masodas* *pa ne?*  
 m=ha-sodas *pa ne*  
 2sg=CAUS-suck or PROX  
 'Do you smoke?' (Bowden 2001, p. 356)
- (28b) *Masodas* *pa te?*  
 m=ha-sodas *pa te*  
 2sg=CAUS-suck or NEG  
 'Do you smoke or not?' (Bowden 2001, p. 356)

The answers to the positive polarity may be either *Jou/Ole* (Yes, I do smoke) or *Te* (No, I don't smoke); when responding to the negative polarity question, the answers are either *Jou/Ole* (Yes, I do *not* smoke), *Te* (No, I *do* smoke).<sup>[30]</sup>

## **Name taboo (Aroah)**

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As is common with many Melanesian people, Taba speakers practice ritual name taboo. As such, when a person dies in a Taba community, their name may not be used by any person with whom they had a close connection. This practice adheres to the Makianese belief that, if the names of the recently deceased are uttered, their spirits may be drastically disturbed. The deceased may be referred to simply as 'Deku's mother' or 'Dula's sister'. Others in the community with the same name as the deceased will be given *maronga*, or substitute names.<sup>[31]</sup>

## **Notes**

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1. Taba (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/mky/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "East Makian" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/east2440>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. *Ethnologue*: Makian, East ([http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=mky](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=mky))
4. Bowden 2001, p. 190
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6. Bowden 2001, p. 5
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